

June 14th, 2007 Field Trip

Field Trip Meeting Notes

Judith Mountains, Camp Maiden Girl Scout Camp

6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Thursday, June 14th, 2007

Meeting begins ~ 6:15pm at Site 2 parking area. Meeting spot changed to Site 2 because Site 1 had been affected by fresh wind-throw & snow-damaged hazard trees.

LOGISTICS

- **Introduction and history of collaboration effort for newcomers – Brad**

Everyone introduces themselves. Brad recaps previous meetings. Everyone present has been to at least one other meeting and is familiar with the goals of the collaboration effort.

- **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, partnerships, and work on private ownership – Brad**

Bob Schrenk from the RMEF discusses an overview of RMEF and specifically the Habitat Stewardship Services mission program. The overall mission of RMEF is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife and their habitat. The foundation looks for opportunities to get involved with projects that can enhance habitats; stewardship projects provide a vehicle to accomplish habitat improvement. This project in the Judith Mountains is big enough to make a difference. So far the foundation is involved with 6 contracts and 2 agreements, ranging in size from 20 acres to 9000 acres. The project work ranges from weed control to fencing to shrub regeneration. The foundation likes to work with agencies and private individuals.

BLM is exploring the option of a partnership with RMEF for projects in the Judiths – the RMEF would serve as the prime contractor for the work, while subcontractors would provide project work.

- **Weeds – Jennifer**

- BLM weed management plan

We inventory before forest treatments and decide if any weeds must be pretreated. If so we treat them prior to project implementation. During and after implementation we continue to monitor and treat weeds. BLM would like to encourage anyone who is considering doing forest treatments on their lands to develop a weed management plan. Weed management plans can be as simple as being aware of what plants are occurring at the site, and keeping an eye on them.

- Weeds day

The weeds day turned into a weed evening. It will be on July 11, Wednesday evening, at the Camp Maiden Girl Scout Camp. We'll get more specific information on the BLM website, in the newspaper, and on the radio. It will be mostly an educational evening, with stations set up to learn about sprayer calibration, weed identification, weed planning, and chemicals to use in forested settings. As time allows, we'll get out and spray some weeds as well. We don't have big populations here, so we would probably split into groups and treat separate areas. Folks that will likely be there include Darren Crawford, the MSU Extension Agent; Jim Sparks, the Fergus County Weed Control Coordinator; Lowell Hassler, BLM's Natural Resource Specialist; Tom Maxwell from BLM; Jennifer Walker from BLM; and possibly Ted Hawn from NRCS.

- **Agenda and questions on back – Brad**

There are questions for folks to think about on the back of the agenda page. (online: *Agenda*, page 2)

OBJECTIVES – Brad

Brad lists objectives and turns discussion over to Bruce

- **Recognize general location of proposed project on the ground**
- **Understand proposed prescriptions for Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine sites**
- **Identify concerns with project proposal (if any) and look for ways to compromise**
 - Silvicultural prescriptions?
 - Others?
- **Reach consensus that allows us to proceed with implementation**

PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION of PROPOSED MAIDEN PROJECT – Bruce

- **3 page handout (prescription guidelines, map, proposed treatments)**

Bruce goes over the handouts and posters that were provided at the last meeting. He explains habitat types and the silvicultural guidelines from the Environmental Assessment - Forest Health and Vegetation Management for the Judith and Moccasin Mountains (JMLA). (This handout can be found under the May 3 meeting, and is called *Silvicultural Prescription EA Guidelines.jpg*).

- **Unit Boundaries**

Bruce displays the map with the proposed boundaries of the Maiden Stewardship area, and of the Park Place timber sale. The group collaboratively agreed that these areas were our first priority areas.

Bruce points to various areas within the Maiden boundaries, and discusses BLM's proposed treatments:

- Road up to Judith Peak – fuelbreak adjacent to road, and shelter cut away from road
- Hillside above road on lower Grassy Peak – set aside for personal use post and pole sales. Meander boundaries so that it looks natural.
- Grassy Peak meadows – the meadows are being encroached by juniper – use prescribed fire during winter when snow drifts and bare ground create favorable conditions to target meadows ('aspect burning'). Allow the fire to work edges of tree patches. Group comments and questions:
 - Valued skiing on those meadow slopes
 - Juniper is valued winter forage for mule deer
 - Lots of juniper all over
 - Mechanical work would do the same thing without getting rid of the juniper
 - The timber has no commercial value
 - What about grinding, or cutting and making windrows to burn?
 - Prescribed fire gets away often, which is a concern for folks
- Bottom areas, including Camp Maiden, the county road, and easterly slopes of Maiden Peak – mechanical treatments with commercial value to achieve forest health objectives. Stream zones would be leave-corridors. Aspen stands would be regenerated. Group comments and questions:
 - You would use pulp? (Bruce: yes, all products where possible)
- West area above private and county road, and along the state land boundary – fuelbreak by hand crew because access is poor due to topography and ownership. Tie in to scree slopes on flanks of Maiden Peak
- Southern area – need to visit with adjacent landowner
- Park Place timber sale – probably a separate sale contract. Fire crew or other crew will provide service work after sale. It is a warm, dry Douglas-fir (DF) habitat type. The project currently has a nice PP overstory from which we can reach our target stand. This habitat is usually easy to work with, and we can create the PP savannah conditions which should be typical of sites like these.

General Discussion:

- What is the timeline? (Bruce: none set yet, depends on our group collaboration. We are getting close – probably layout this winter. Stewardship contracts can go up to 10 years. A typical timber sale generally runs 18 to 24 months for follow-up work like firewood gathering, pile burning, weed treatments, under burning, etc. If we look at a RMEF partnership it could go for 10 years. If we proceed with layout this winter, we could look at awarding the contract maybe next spring (2008).
- What about private? (Bob: yes, RMEF does that) (Bruce: yes, we have opportunities to do that through stewardship contracting, and especially through RMEF)
- How many contracts will there be? (Bruce: the Maiden area will be just one contract. It will be a rather typical contract, just lots of work which could be variable. Park Place may be it's own contract because we may be able to move forward sooner)

- The value is the commercial taken out at the same time as the service work
- Lots of small contracts require 'riding herd'; you've got to keep an eagle eye on these guys. (Bruce: we could have lots of pieces at the same time but we can do that) (Jennifer: for example Bruce and Brad could administer the commercial part of the contract, while I could administer the service work. If there was a kiosk or parking area or other similar thing, one of our engineers could administer that part of the contract)
- Could you discuss 'best value contracts'? (Bruce: essentially in the past we awarded the contract to the highest bid for purchase of the commercial volume. Now we award by best proposal, contractor past performance, and cost. We can state in the solicitation which part will be evaluated the heaviest, so for example, we could award a contract where cost is the lowest consideration)

- **Access**

Most of the project area is accessible through BLM lands. Some of the southern outlier areas could be treated if access was obtained from a couple of adjacent landowners – Bruce mentions discussions have begun.

- **Silvicultural prescriptions**

Bruce explains that our first project is mostly the Moderate Douglas-fir habitat type, and goes over the JMLA prescription guidelines. The target stand is 50 - 70% ponderosa pine (PP), 30 - 40% Douglas-fir (DF), and 5 - 10% lodgepole pine (LP).

He discusses the desired 'target' stand, and explains that our challenge is we don't currently have the overstory or understory species mix to accomplish the target mix in one treatment/entry. In the overstory, we currently have about 5% PP, 15% DF, and 80% LP; and in the understory we have about 5% PP, 85% DF, and 10% LP. This means we will have to create conditions that favor reestablishment of PP, which could include planting. Most of the existing LP overstory is old (for our area) and becoming decadent, so we will need to remove most of the existing LP overstory. We can work with the current understory, leaving the best and most likely to release. Lots of DF, some LP, but not much PP.

Last week, Bruce and Brad flagged 'leave trees' in two demonstration sites.

- **Site 1**

We had to abandon this site for this meeting because of the hazard from recent blow-down.

This site shows the most extreme treatment because the percent species mix is so far off. We would utilize wood products as possible, but there would be lots of service work as well.

Brad shows graphs of the target species mix, and a graph of the current species mix. (online: *Brad's Species Ratio Poster.jpg*) The LP is ~ 100 years old, which is about max for our area.

- **Site 2**

At this site, Bruce and Brad flagged the obvious leave trees. There were too few, so they went through again and flagged more. Someone from the group was just involved with a project like this, and discusses how they had to do a seed tree cut to get the stand back through natural seedlings. Another person asks if we took the big LP and left the smaller ones, will they blow down? Brad answers – if we catch the young ones, they will release and should become firm.

Brad and Bruce briefly discuss tree diseases, pests, and poor form. At this meeting, the intent is for folks to look at the site, consider the current and target conditions, and flag more trees.

The group breaks and wanders through the site – there are side discussions. No one flags additional trees. Upon reconvening, Bruce asks the group what they think. Group comments and questions:

- Blowdown is pretty bad
- Bruce: everything is pretty far off track. Tight now we are at 135 basal area, want to be 40; but we are so far off that we can't get a 40 that has the correct species mix. PP is scarce at 5%. We don't have much to work with in many areas. We may consider interplanting PP. To help folks visualize different basal areas, Bruce displays a poster with timber stand illustrations that demonstrate basal areas ranging from 40 to 135.
- What about heavy snow / high winds?

- Haven't had a real snowpack since '79; before then snow was deep deep deep
- Its that wet sloppy stuff that does the damage
- Don't know how to balance it. (Bruce: open it up to get new regen starting)
- So if you treat it and get damage, just keep at it. (Bruce: yes, we can treat on our own terms. Wildfire and other disturbances inevitably come in and do it for us, but it won't be on our own terms; and will be at an inconvenient time)
- There are a few trees that survived the 1890 fires. When we logged on our place we drilled those trees and left the ones that had some rot and some sound ones too. Those old trees will stand for 50 more years. Some of them we took for sale, but we wanted to preserve some too.
- How is BLM going to pay for all of this? (Bruce: explains 'goods for services' – we can offset the cost of the work with the value of the commercial)

General discussion ensues about how we don't have much merchantable volume, and the markets are so far away that pulp is difficult to sell. Don't have markets for biomass utilization. The group discusses how to get the service work done inexpensively, and that there will be heavy amounts of slash that will need to be burned or somehow treated.

- What about a mulch head on a feller-buncher? (Bruce: yes, we're considering all of the possibilities including skidding everything out – the submerch could be used for firewood.
- What about chips? (Bruce: yes, we'll try to do biomass utilization when we can) (Brad mentions a rule of thumb he read about that biomass companies must be within 50 miles, whereas our markets are hundreds of miles away)
- Something to think about when marketing the sale: we could group together to pool commercial trees. (Bruce: yes, it is very possible to pool together because we are all working together. We also have opportunities if we enter a partnership with RMEF. Another idea could be saving on operation costs, for example, right now BLM has an opportunity to use DNRC's contactor at Park Place)
- I would just as soon work with a small logger.

Wrap-up of Site 2: the group feels there is not really anything more to flag, and that we'll have sites like this without much to work with.

CONSENSUS CHECK – Brad – 20:00

Brad emphasizes for folks to contact us with questions and concerns.

If we (BLM) doesn't hear from anyone within a couple of weeks, we will assume a resounding 'yes' from the group; and will move forward with implementation.

- **Are we comfortable moving forward with project implementation?**
- **Are there specific issues we need to resolve at the next meeting that cannot be resolved this evening?**

WHAT'S NEXT? – Brad – 20:20

- **Weed evening July 11 at Camp Maiden**
- **Introduction to Stewardship Project protocol and procedures**
- **Discussion of service work (i.e., thinning, fire breaks, road improvements/maintenance, and kiosk location & construction)**
- **Work party (get a feel for timber cruising and tree painting)**
- **Forest planning and development of management plans for private land**
- **Bugs and disease / fire ecology**